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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0239
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SUBJECT: CHAVEZ TO MISS IBERO-AMERICAN SUMMIT; CITES
SECURITY

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez announced October 25 that he will not attend Ibero-American Summit because El Salvador could not guarantee his safety. President Saca publicly discounted Chavez's claims saying that he had guaranteed the safety of all attendees. Saca said Chavez was using security as a pretext to avoid leaving Venezuela. Chavez's absence will benefit the (left-wing) FMLN, which accepts Venezuelan petro-dollar funding, but has been trying to publicly distance itself from Chavez in the lead up to the 2009 elections. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez announced October 25 that he would not attend the Ibero-American Summit, scheduled for October 29-31 in San Salvador, because El Salvador could not guarantee his safety. Chavez claimed that armed groups were plotting to assassinate him and that the agents of the CIA and FBI, along with associates of exiled Cuban Luis Posada Carriles, would be in El Salvador during the summit.

¶3. (U) President Saca said publicly on October 26 that he had guaranteed the security of Chavez and all the conference attendees and had given Venezuela full access to the security plans. He said that the Venezuelan advance team had verified the security arrangements, including the routes to be used during the conference. Saca said that Chavez was using security as a pretext to avoid leaving Venezuela prior to the November 23 municipal elections. Foreign Minister Marisol Argueta said on a television interview October 27 that the GOES has received no formal notification of Chavez's cancellation in any diplomatic channel.

¶4. (SBU) Comment: Chavez's last minute cancellation comes as a surprise, as he was expected to attend a number of non-summit events. His absence will likely benefit the FMLN, which had been trying to downplay ties and support from Venezuela.

GLAZER